

The Dead Time Traveling Derelict
Jonathan D. Steinhoff, © 7.18.10

A derelict, perpetually in a drunken stupor, wanders around throughout the day, following his own little routine, more or less oblivious to everyone and everything around him.

During the course of the same day, while fishing around in various garbage cans at various times, the derelict on three separate occasions finds three separate magic amulet necklaces, causing him to mutter to himself, "Hey, I'm having a pretty lucky day today! Now I just need a good oatmeal cookie."

One amulet has a skeleton with crossbones on it, the second has a symbol of life on it, and the third has an hourglass on it. He puts the amulets in his pocket, and later that day shows them to his perpetually drunk woman derelict friend. She looks them over carefully. "Oh-oh, this amulet means death." "No! That's bad!" "And this one means... life." "Oh good! Oh good!" "And this one... something to do with traveling in time, I think." "Just how do you know all that?" "Didn't I ever tell you? I was once a fortune teller. Somehow, I just couldn't make a living at it, I don't know why. People don't like their fortune tellers getting drunk I guess, makes them get all superstitious." "So, so, do any of these omelets, uh, mean I'm going to find a bottle of whiskey? I need for one of these omelets to say that!" She studies them again, carefully turning them over in her hand. She thinks, then says, "No." "Rats! Well... I'll see you later!" The derelict hurries off, and she calls after him, "Okay!" He calls back, "Okay!" "Hey, it only matters if you wear them!" "What was that?" he calls. "Wear them? Okay!" He tries to put all three around his neck, but his drunken lack of coordination causes one, the time traveling amulet, to fall to the ground. He hastily picks it up and thrusts it in his pocket, wearing only two of the three amulets.

A short time later the death amulet magically glows, and the derelict suddenly meets his death: a speeding train strikes him. His spirit initially starts to rise up out of his body, but the life amulet, magically glowing, pulls him back down, and the derelict goes stumbling away in his usual drunken stupor. He shouts after the train shaking his fist, "Why don't you watch where you're going!"

From that point on, no one is able to see him - unless they are very, very drunk, which magically makes him visible to them. Their being drunk doesn't help their credibility when they do see him, in terms of being able to defend that he really is there. And so the derelict goes on as before with his own little routine, day in, day out, more or less oblivious to everyone and everything around him.

Then, one day, the derelict comes upon the time traveling amulet while fishing around in his pocket for something. He looks at it, remembers it, and puts it around his neck. From that point forward he occasionally travels back in time, all of a sudden, in small increments, one day backward at a time, so that cumulatively he is going further and further back in time. At first he fails to notice this is going on.

In the course of his normal routine, the derelict once in a while overhears conversations, and after he has gone backward in time somewhat, certain things in what he hears strike him as odd, as they subtly reflect that he is further back in time. These discrepancies, when he notices them, cause him to mutter remarks to himself. For example, he hears a conversation about the Yankees having defeated the Orioles on Tuesday. A few days later, he overhears a conversation wherein it is wondered whether the Yankees will defeat the Orioles on Tuesday. He mutters to himself, "Why do the Orioles play the Yankees every Tuesday? Who needs them to do that?"

These observations make it increasingly apparent to him that something strange is going on, yet he continues going about his business as usual, more or less oblivious to everyone and everything. He is the last one to presume that he has special knowledge of what's going on, and only mutters things to himself because he knows he is the only one listening.

When on occasion the derelict becomes specially visible to someone because that person is intoxicated, it is never clear that something particularly special is taking place. Others see a drunken person noticing something invisible, which seems consistent with drunken behavior. And the drunken person assumes nothing out of the ordinary is occurring as well.

Finally the derelict comes upon the newspaper article about how he was killed, which includes a description of a few particular things that make it clear the article is about him. "This sounds familiar. I remember that, that's me, I remember getting hit by that train! I think." At last he puts it all together, looking at the life and death amulets alternately. He checks his theory with his derelict woman friend, who finds his conclusion makes perfect sense. "That guy who

was hit by the train – that was you?” She helps fill in some of the details regarding what must be going on, her past experience as a fortune teller having made her knowledgeable in such matters.

At one point the derelict happens to overhear two people discussing a particular stock investment, exuberant at how it paid off big due to some surprise event with relation to the company involved. Later, when the derelict travels back in time, he overhears the same two, only now their conversation indicates the event that was the big news for this company hasn’t happened yet.

Finally the derelict goes back to a point in time almost immediately prior to his train accident. He runs into himself drunkenly and obviously going about his routine, but neither one scarcely registers seeing the other, as they both have the tendency not to be particularly observant. “Oh look, it’s me! Hello.” “Hello.” “See you later.” “So long.”

Shortly thereafter the derelict (the time traveling dead one) has a chance conversation with a drunken millionaire. The derelict drunkenly reveals how he believes he is dead and traveling backwards in time. He speaks of the successful stock, as it seems something that would interest the millionaire. Very drunk, the millionaire is quite receptive to believing what the derelict tells him. Furthermore, the drunken millionaire tells the derelict that, if he can reveal to him the exact name of the company that will have the great success, he will let the derelict share in the monetary benefits he plans to reap from this information. The derelict thinks and thinks, but cannot remember the company’s name. However, he does know where he can go where he might be able to listen to the two who are always talking about this company, and so be reminded of the company’s name.

“But how can you help me? I am going backward in time and you are going forward! Right? Ha-ha-ha! How can you give me money *after* the company stock goes up?” “I don’t, I don’t... I don’t know! I’ll try to, though! Ha-ha-ha!” “Okay! I’ll go find out the name of the company for you! But you have to try and get the money to me somehow!” “I promise! I will try to find you!” “Okay! Now don’t you go away! I’ll be right back with the name of the company!” “I’ll stay right here!” The derelict goes running off to hear the two speak the company’s name.

The derelict is successful, but as he is running back to the drunken millionaire with the information, he happens to come upon himself again, stumbling along on his way to his rendezvous with destiny, i.e., about to be hit by the train. As anxious as he is to continue on his way back to the millionaire, he suddenly stops, unable to decide if he should try to do something in advance of the train

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hitting the other version of himself. He recognizes the situation and knows what will happen to himself if he does nothing. Finally, at the last moment, he decides to push himself to the ground and out of the way of the train, causing the dead time traveling version of himself to fade into oblivion. The surviving version, his life having been saved, brushes himself off and continues going about his usual routine. Suddenly he is aware of the three amulets, taking the two from around his neck and the third from his pocket. He throws them on the ground, muttering, "What do I want with these omelets. To think how lucky I felt when I found them!" He goes stumbling away, as the train fades in the distance.

The End